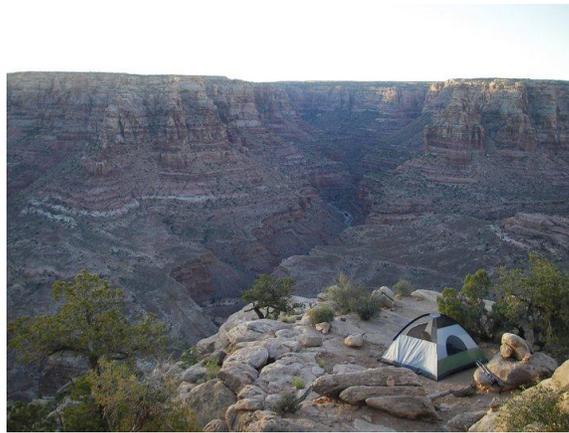


United States Department of the Interior Bureau of Land Management

Environmental Assessment
DOI-BLM-UT-Y020-2015-026

October, 2015

Dark Canyon SRMA Guided Canyoneering Special Recreation Permits



Location: Dark Canyon SRMA, Monticello Field Office

T. 32 S., R. 16 E., various sections

T. 32 S., R. 17 E., various sections

T. 32 S., R. 18 E., various sections

T. 33 S., R. 16 E., various sections

T. 33 S., R. 17 E., various sections

T. 33 S., R. 18 E., various sections

T. 34 S., R. 16 E., various sections

T. 34 S., R. 17 E., various sections

Applicant/Address: BLM Monticello Field Office

Monticello Field Office
365 N. Main St.
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**Dark Canyon SRMA Guided Canyoneering
Special Recreation Permits
DOI-BLM-UT-Y020-2015-026**

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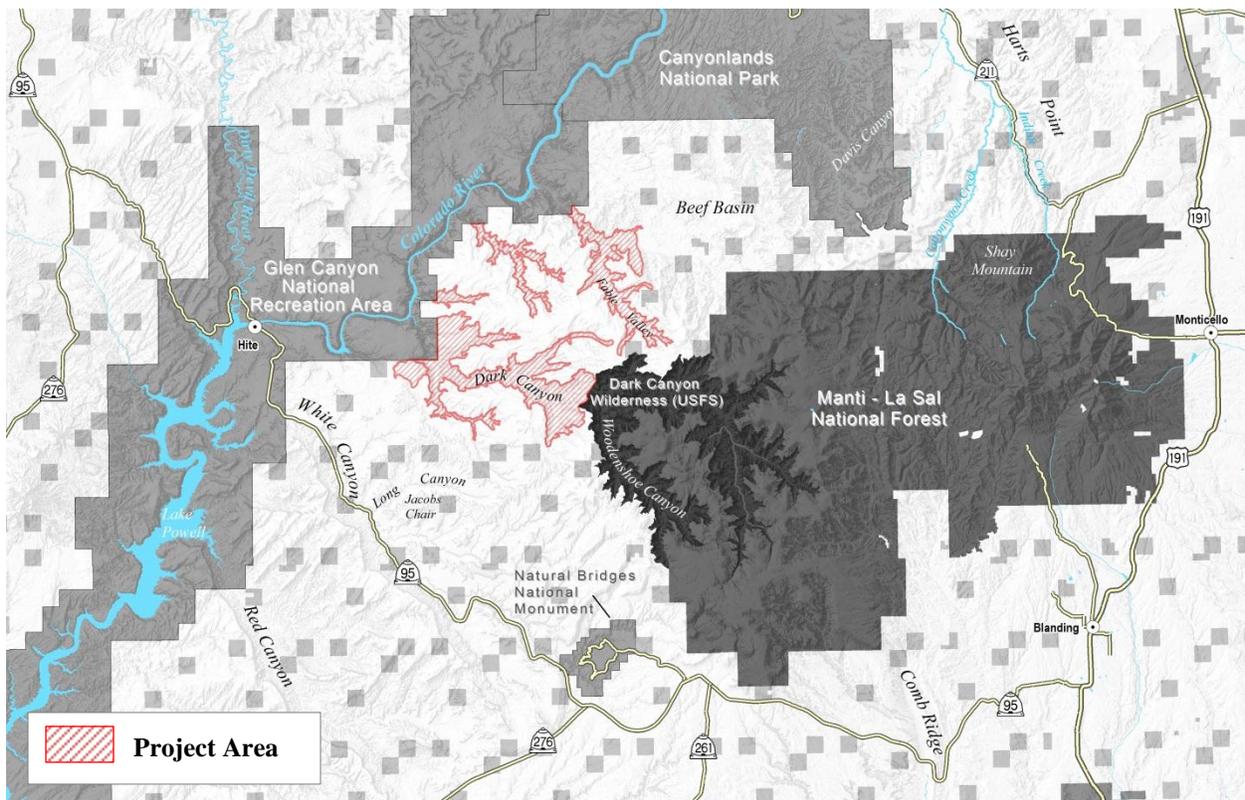
**DARK CANYON SRMA GUIDED CANYONEERING
SPECIAL RECREATION PERMITS
DOI-BLM-UT-Y020-2015-026**

**CHAPTER 1
INTRODCUTION AND NEED FOR THE PROPOSED ACTION**

INTRODUCTION

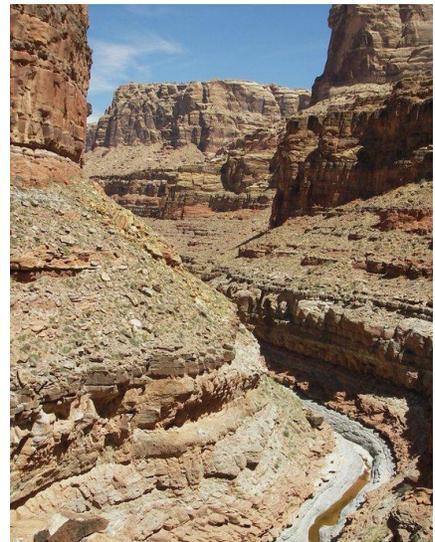
This Environmental Assessment (EA) has been prepared to disclose and analyze the environmental consequences of the issuance of Special Recreation Permits (SRPs) for commercial guided canyoneering in Dark Canyon SRMA.

The BLM Monticello Field Office (MtFO) proposes to authorize Special Recreation Permits (SRPs) for commercial guided canyoneering in the Dark Canyon Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA). Based on demand, MtFO has historically permitted twelve canyoneering guides in the SRMA, but currently permits only eleven due to one cancellation at the end of 2014. MtFO has received three additional applications to add Dark Canyon to existing SRPs over the last three years.



Map 1. Vicinity Map for Proposed Action Project Area

Proposed Action will focus on the following drainages and associated trailheads in the SRMA: Dark Canyon, Gypsum Canyon, Bowdie Canyon, Lean To Canyon, Palmer Canyon, Lost Canyon (sometimes mapped as Long Canyon), Black Steer Canyon, Young's Canyon, and Fable Valley Canyon. Dark Canyon SRMA encompasses these canyons and their tributaries, as well as narrow strips of canyon rims and trailheads. The Sundance Trail and Fable Valley designated trails are within the proposed action area. This Proposed Action considers existing, proposed, and projected guiding use on Bureau of Land Management (BLM) land only. BLM does not permit use on private or State Institutional Lands Trust Administration (SITLA), National Park Service (NPS) or United States Forest Service (USFS) lands.



Floor of Dark Canyon between the Sundance Trail and Young's Canyon

NEED FOR THE PROPOSED ACTION

The need for this action is established by BLM's responsibility under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA). FLPMA establishes outdoor recreation as one of the principal uses of public lands and directs the DOI to regulate through permits or other instruments the use of the public lands, which includes commercial recreation use. According to regulation 43 CFR 2932.25 the BLM must provide a response to a recreation application if one is received.

PURPOSE(S) OF THE PROPOSED ACTION

The purpose of the proposed action is to provide business owners with authorization to pursue a recreation-based commercial venture on public lands managed by the BLM. The decision to be made is whether or not to issue SRPs to guided canyoneering outfitters for trips in Dark Canyon SRMA, and if permits are issued, what would be the terms and conditions on the permit. BLM will consider approval of the proposed recreational activity in a manner that avoids or reduces impact on other recreational users and prevents unnecessary or undue degradation of the public lands. In order to evaluate the entire SRP program for commercial canyoneering guides MtFO is conducting a programmatic analysis of existing and projected use. This analysis includes use numbers for eleven current SRP holders operating in Dark Canyon, three SRP holders who have requested Dark Canyon be added to current permits, and some capacity for future applications.

CONFORMANCE WITH BLM LAND USE PLAN(S)

The alternatives including the proposed action analyzed in this environmental assessment (EA) have been determined to be in conformance with the current land use plan referred to as the Monticello Field Office Resource Management Plan (RMP) and approved on November 17, 2008.

Page 89 of the RMP identifies the following decision regarding management of Dark Canyon:

- **REC-4** "The following actions require a signed agreement with the specified agency:

Manage the BLM portion of Dark Canyon Complex in coordination with Manti-La Sal National Forest and Glen Canyon National Recreation Area.”

Page 91 of the RMP identifies the following decisions regarding issuance of SRPs:

- **REC-17** "Special Recreation Permits will be issued as a discretionary action as a means to help meet management objectives, contact visitor use, protect recreational and natural resources and provide for the health and safety of visitors.”
- **REC-18** “All SRPs will contain standard stipulations appropriate for the type of activity and may include additional stipulations necessary to protect lands or resources, reduce user conflicts, or minimize health and safety concerns.”

Page 105 of the RMP identifies the Goals and Objectives for Dark Canyon SRMA as: “Provide outstanding recreational opportunities and visitor experiences, while protecting natural and cultural resource values through integrated management between the BLM, USFS and NPS” and “Provide a primitive, roadless, and undeveloped recreational experience in an essentially unmodified natural environment. Continue to provide a scenic backcountry experience of expansive views from within one of the deepest canyon systems in the region. By the year 2012, manage this SRMA to provide opportunities for visitors to realize personal development and growth, enhanced lifestyle, increased local tourism revenue and maintenance of distinct recreation setting character.” Page 106 of the RMP identifies the following decisions regarding management of Dark Canyon SRMA that relate to the proposed action:

- **REC-120** “The Dark Canyon SRMA includes canyon rims and bottoms for Dark Canyon, Gypsum Canyon, Bowdie Canyon, Lean To Canyon, Palmer Canyon, Lost Canyon, Black Steer Canyon, Young’s Canyon, and Fable Valley Canyon. Trailheads and associated parking/camping areas are included within the SRMA boundaries where the canyons are specified as the SRMA.
- **REC-121** “The Dark Canyon WSA overlays the SRMA and will be managed according to the IMP.”
- **REC-124** “Dark Canyon SRMA (30,820 acres) is managed with the following prescriptions:
 - Group size is limited to 18 people for private and commercial.
 - Three commercial trips are allowed per week.
 - If and where necessary, camping will be restricted to designated sites only.
 - Campfires are allowed on mesa tops. Cook stoves only in canyons.
 - Unavailable for private and/or commercial collection of woodland product use, except for the on-site collection of dead wood for campfires on mesa tops.
 - If human waste becomes a problem, carrying out waste may be implemented in canyon.”

The following decisions are identified in the RMP and relate to the proposed action:

- **ACEC-29** “Dark Canyon ACEC lies entirely within the Dark Canyon WSA (Map 10) and partially within the Dark Canyon SRMA (Map 9). WSAs are managed under the IMP, unless more restrictive management is prescribed.”
- **ACEC-30** “Dark Canyon is not managed as an ACEC. The ACEC lies entirely within the Dark Canyon WSA (Map 10) and is managed according to the IMP and the Dark Canyon SRMA management prescriptions outlined in the Recreation section of this chapter. The WSA and SRMA are closed to OHV use.”
- **WSR-11** “The Dark Canyon Segment is identified as suitable for designation into the National Wild and Scenic River System.”
- **WSR-12** “This segment is managed with the following prescriptions:
 - VRM Class I.
 - Unavailable for oil and gas leasing.
 - Closed to OHV use.
 - Recommended for withdrawal from locatable mineral entry.”
- **TM-22** “Manage the following trails for non-mechanized use: Open to Foot Travel: Dark Canyon (Sundance Trail), Fable Valley Trail”
- **VRM-1** “422,989 acres are managed as VRM Class I (Map 16). These areas include:
 - Dark Canyon ISA Complex (62,040 acres)
 - Dark Canyon Suitable River Segment”

RELATIONSHIPS TO STATUTES, REGULATIONS AND OTHER PLANS:

The action is consistent with the Master Plan for San Juan County of July 8, 1996. The Master Plan identifies recreation and tourism as an economic opportunity and calls for working to promote recreation and tourism within the county while maintaining a rural lifestyle.

The County Master Plan states:

- “The county views recreation and tourism as an additional economic opportunity. The County believes this opportunity may only be in its infant stage. The County will continue to assist the travel council in promoting the county’s tourist industry. San Juan County believes and encourages private sector development of recreational facilities and services. The county will also continue to support and work in partnership with agencies, entities and interest groups to promote recreation and tourism in San Juan County.” (page 54)

Table 1. Regulatory Authorities and Guidance

Federal Authorities and Responsibilities	
Cultural Resources	
BLM Native American Trust Resource Policies (303 DM 2 and 512 DM 2); BLM H-8120-1 – General Procedural Guidance for Native American Consultation; BLM Manual 8120, Tribal Consultation under Cultural Resources; Executive Order (EO) 13175 Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments (65 FR 67249, November 2000); EO 13007 Indian Sacred Sites (61 FR 26671, May 1996); American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978 (Public Law [PL] 95-341; 42 United States Code [USC] 1996)	Native American consultation regarding possibly affected traditional cultural properties.
Archaeological and Historic Data Preservation Act of 1974 (PL 86-253, as amended by PL 93291; 16 USC 469); Archaeological Resources Protection Act of 1979 (PL 96-95; 16 USC. 470aa-mm); National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, Section 106, (PL 89-665; 16 USC 407(f) and 36 CFR Part 800)	Requirement for cultural resource inventories to determine the presence of cultural resources and protection of sites discovered during project operations.
Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990 (PL 101-601)	Procedures to be followed in the event of discovery of human remains.
Paleontological Resources	
Paleontological Resources Preservation Act of 2009	Requirement for paleontological resource inventories to determine the presence of fossil resources and protection of sites discovered during project operations.
Land Management and Use	
Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, Section 201(a) (PL 94-579; 43 USC 1701 et seq.)	Management of federal lands under principles of multiple use and sustained yield while protecting environmental resources.
National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (PL 91-190; 42 USC 4321); 40 CFR Parts 1500-1508 CEQ implementation of NEPA; BLM Handbook H-1790-1; U.S. Department of the Interior Department Manual 516, Environmental Quality	Evaluation of impacts to environmental resources that may result from a proposed action prior to its implementation.
Travel Management	
43 CFR 8342.1(a)(b)(c)(d)	Criteria used to locate proposed parking areas.
Wildlife	
Bald Eagle and Golden Eagle Protection Act of 1940 (16 USC 668-668d, 54 Stat. 250) as amended [PL 95-616 (92 Stat. 3114)] November 8, 1978.	Coordination, consultation and impact review regarding eagles.
Endangered Species Act of 1973 (PL 85-624; 16 USC 661, 664 1008)	Coordination, consultation and impact review regarding federally listed threatened and endangered species.
Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 (16 USC 703-712, as amended); EO 13186 Responsibilities of Federal Agencies to Protect Migratory Birds; BLM Memorandum of Understanding WO-230-2010-04 To Promote the Conservation of Migratory Birds	Migratory bird impact coordination and protection of nesting migratory birds.
State of Utah Authorities and Responsibilities	
Cultural Resources	
Section 106 of National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended (16 USC 470 et seq.) and Advisory Council Regulations on the Protection of Historic and Cultural Properties, as amended (36 CFR Part 800)	Utah State Historic Preservation Office consultation on cultural resource survey, evaluation, and mitigation.
Wildlife	
Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR) Rules and Regulations, Rule 657 series; UAC Title 23, Wildlife Resources of Utah.	Coordination on wildlife and state-sensitive species; management of big game and wildlife.

IDENTIFICATION OF ISSUES

The BLM utilized an interdisciplinary team (IDT) and public scoping comments to identify issues. The resources and issues considered by the IDT are provided in the IDT Checklist (Appendix A). The BLM posted the proposed action on the ePlanning website in May of 2015, to solicit public input and concerns. No comments were received from the public during this period. As a result of internal scoping, the only issue carried forward for further analysis is recreation.

Two issues brought up in internal scoping were considered, but eliminated from analysis based upon design features incorporated within the action alternatives. These included the potential for damage to cultural sites and potential impacts to raptors and migratory birds. See the Interdisciplinary Team Checklist (Appendix A) for the full rationale for eliminating these resources from analysis.

SUMMARY OF EA ORGANIZATION

Chapter 1 has presented the purpose and need for the proposed SRPs, as well as the relevant issues; i.e., those elements or resources that could potentially be affected by the implementation of the Proposed Action. In order to meet the purpose and need of the proposed project in a way that resolves the issues, the BLM has considered and/or developed a range of action alternatives. These alternatives are presented in Chapter 2. The setting or description of the affected environment is presented in Chapter 3. The potential environmental impacts or consequences resulting from the implementation of each alternative considered in detail are analyzed in Chapter 4 for each of the identified issues brought forward from the checklist analysis. Chapters 5 and 6 provide information Consultation and References respectively.

CHAPTER 2

DESCRIPTION OF ALTERNATIVES

INTRODUCTION

The BLM ID Team rigorously explored all reasonable alternatives that meet the underlying purpose and need for the proposed project and that respond to the issues. BLM carried forward two alternatives for full analysis within this EA: Proposed Action and the No Action alternative. The No Action alternative is considered and analyzed to provide a baseline for comparison of the impacts of the proposed action.

PROPOSED ACTION

The BLM Monticello Field Office would authorize Special Recreation Permits (SRPs) for commercial guiding canyoneering on lands managed by the Monticello Field Office in Dark Canyon SRMA. All existing, expired, and new applications would be approved at historic (for existing) or requested (for new) allocations of user days, with projected capacity for future applicants based on current requests.

Permitted activities would include guided canyoneering and associated camping in Dark Canyon SRMA. Modes of travel within canyons would include hiking, down climbing, rappelling, and occasional swimming. Camping would consist of vehicle camping at trailheads on canyon rims and dispersed backpacking in previously disturbed sites in the canyon. Groups may use up to 10 campsites during a trip. Canyoneering would be authorized year round, but would generally be concentrated in the spring and fall. Trip duration ranges from 1 day to 14 days. Group size is limited to no more than 18 participants, inclusive of guests and guides. No more than three guided trips will be in the canyon in a one week period. This will be scheduled in advance through the BLM. Guides will provide a proposed itinerary to BLM in advance of all trips and report all use at the end of the year.

Leave No Trace principals will be followed at all times, and will be incorporated into curriculum before and during trips. Participants would be shuttled to trailheads exclusively on designated routes. Existing trails would be used when available, with all other travel taking place in canyon floors. Each campsite will be less than ¼ acre of previously disturbed ground. Cultural resources and cryptobiotic soils will be avoided during hiking and camping. There will be no modification of springs, and removal of vegetation from springs and seeps is not allowed. Human waste will be disposed of via catholes, and all other waste will be packed out. New bolting and fixed anchors for ropes would not be allowed.

Stipulations

The proposal would include the following design features that would be applied as stipulations to each permit upon authorization:

Areas of Operation: Canyons traversed during trips include: Dark Canyon, Gypsum Canyon, Bowdie Canyon, Lean To Canyon, Palmer Canyon, Lost Canyon (sometimes mapped as Long Canyon), Black Steer Canyon, Young's Canyon, and Fable Valley Canyon.

Camping: Groups will not camp within 200 feet of cultural sites, riparian areas, or water sources, including wildlife guzzlers. There will be no camping in alcoves. A fire pan would be used for campfires on canyon rims if there is no metal fire ring. All garbage would be packed out to an approved disposal location. No wood cutting would be allowed. Permittee will use existing previously disturbed sites, and will not construct additional fire rings or seating at campsites sites. Human waste will be disposed of via catholes, and all other waste will be packed out. Camping is not to exceed 14 days.

Cultural Resource: No camping would occur on known structures, artifacts, petroglyphs or pictographs. The permit holder will be held legally and financially responsible for historical, archaeological, cultural, or ecological values damaged, destroyed, or removed by trip participants. Cultural artifacts located on the surface of an archaeological site or isolated artifacts are not to be disturbed. Moving or disturbing cultural artifacts from any location is a violation of federal law.

Wildlife: To avoid disturbance to wildlife during the nesting season March 1- August 31, the permittee will not hike one-half hour before or after sunrise or sunset.

Monitoring: Permittee must allow the BLM to accompany tours for monitoring purposes.

Existing and Expired SRPs Considered in this Analysis

SRP Holders are required to report use each year in order to determine appropriate fees and to track use in a given area. Reported categories include total number of clients, total number of guides, total number of trips, and any deductions for time spent out of the use area. Based on reported use from current and expired SRPs for 2013 and 2014, total reported use days within Dark Canyon SRMA **average 1,559 total use days per year.**

Table 0. Historic Average SRP Use by Year

Year	Number of DC SRP Holders	Number of DC trips per year	Average guests per trip	Average guides per trip	Average days per trip	Total user days for all IC SRPs (actual use)
2013	7	3	11	2	6	1,474
2014	8	2	9	2	8	1,664
Average	8	3	10	2	7	1,559

Specific Permittees and Applicants Considered in this Analysis

Twelve current, expired, and cancelled SRPs were considered in this analysis (see Table 2.2). Average guests, guides, days, and yearly use days provided below show that most companies operate with a fairly similar trip type in Dark Canyon. Most permitted use in Dark Canyon consists of multi-day backpacking trips with fairly large groups. National Outdoor Leadership Dark Canyon Commercial Canyoneering EA

School (NOLS) and High Mountain Institute are the only operators with trips that regularly exceed one week in duration, while Outward Bound tends to take several short trips in Dark Canyon per year. Colorado Alpine and Desert Adventures had no use over the last two years, and cancelled their permit at the end of 2014. The other operators tend to use the canyon sporadically, with a maximum of 2 trips per year and many years with no use.

Table 3. Projected Average Trip Type by SRP Holder based on Historic Use

Current or Expired SRP Holder Name	trips per year	average guests/trip	average guides/trip	average days per trip	average use days/year
Colorado Alpine and Desert Adventure (Cancelled permit as of 12/31/2014)	0	0	0	0	0
Colorado Mountain College	2	9	1	5	190
Colorado Rocky Mountain School	0.5	10	2	7	84
Colvig Silver Camps	0.5	8	2	5	50
Deer Hill Expeditions	1.5	12	3	6	255
High Mountain Institute	2	10	3	9	225
National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS)	3	12	2	12	556
Outward Bound	5.5	10	2	6	351
Prescott College	0.5	6	2	3	50
Sierra Club	0.5	10	2	7	84
Telluride Mountain School	0.5	13	2	4	60
Wild Rockies Field Institute	0.5	8	3	4	40
Projected Total Use Per Year	17 trips	197 total participants		104 days	1,945

*Only years in which one or more trips were reported were included in this analysis. Actual use (Table 2), taking into account years with no use, are therefore about 80% lower than averages by company.

New Applicants Considered in this Analysis

Under Alternative A, permits would be granted for all new applications at requested use numbers. In the last three years, BLM has received three requests from current SRP holders to amend existing permits to include guided canyoneering in Dark Canyon (see Table 3). Projected use figures were derived from information provided by SRP applicants. If each of the new and amended SRPs is issued as per application requests, this would result in a maximum of 456 additional user days per year.

Table 4. Requested Use for New and Amended SRP Applications

SRP Applicant or Amendment Name	projected min/max # guests per trip	projected # guides per trip	projected # days per trip	projected # trips per year	maximum estimated additional user days
Museum of Northern Arizona	10	2	7	2	168
Albuquerque Academy	13	2	4	2	120
Four Corners Adventures	10	2	7	2	168
Total Estimated Projected Use for New and Amended SRPs:				6	456

Projected Use Based on Historic Use Averages and New Permit Applications

Use numbers would be based on historic use, new applications at requested use levels, and anticipated requests. Historic use data suggest that average user days per company range from 40 days per year in low years to 556 days per year in high years. MtFO has received three new permit applications received in the last three years, with a maximum of 168 user days per applicant per year. In the same time period, one operator has chosen to cancel their permit. Trends suggest MtFO will continue to receive new applications for guided canyoneering in Dark Canyon at a rate of one per year or less.

Assuming that MtFO continues to renew expired permits and grants five new applications in the next five years, projected maximum use could be 2,855 user days per year by 2020, with projected actual use of 2,284 user days per year. This range accommodates current average user days and projected use based on new applications, while including an allowance for a substantial increase in maximum user days for future applications.

Maximum User Day Projection for 20 SRPs:

1559 projected use days for existing permits (12 current and expired SRPs)
456 new applicant use days (3 new applicants)
+ 840 future applicant use days (5 future applicants x 168 use days)
= 2,855 Maximum Projected Use Days by 2020

NO ACTION

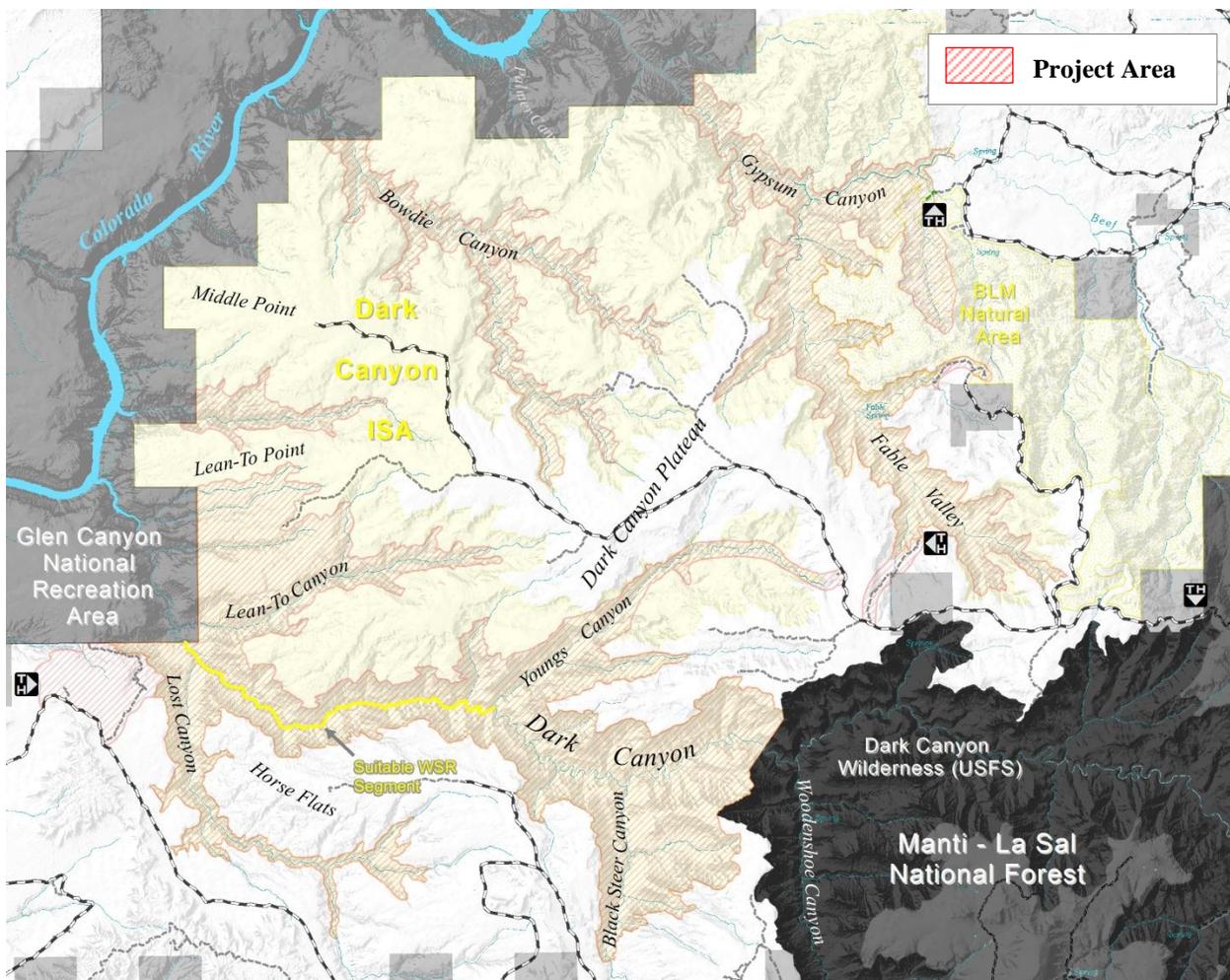
The No Action Alternative is to deny SRP renewals for existing permittees and new SRP applications for commercial canyoneering guides. Those guides already permitted to guide in Dark Canyon would continue operations until the terms of those permits expire. There would be no authorized guided canyoneering within the Dark Canyon SRMA as of January 1, 2020.

CHAPTER 3 AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

INTRODUCTION AND GENERAL SETTING

Chapter 3 presents the potentially affected existing environment (i.e., the physical, biological, social, and economic values and resources) of the impact area as identified in the IDT Checklist (Appendix A) and presented in Chapter 1 of this assessment. This chapter provides the baseline for comparison of impacts/consequences described in Chapter 4.

Dark Canyon SRMA is located in San Juan County approximately 35 miles west of Monticello, UT and 45 miles southwest of Moab, UT. The area is dominated by a network of deeply incised narrow canyons which drain southeast to northwest from the highlands of the Manti La Sal National Forest through BLM lands to the Colorado River in Glen Canyon National Recreation Area. The larger Dark Canyon area ranges in elevation from near 8,000 feet on canyon rims near the Forest Service boundary to 3,700 feet where Dark Canyon drains into the Colorado River.



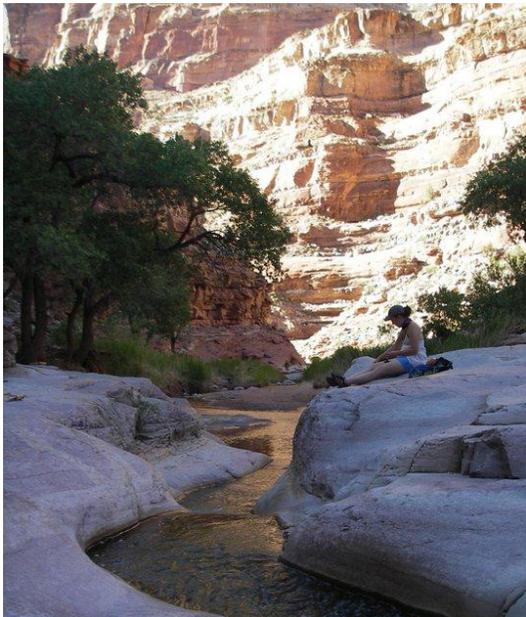
Map of Project Area showing major drainages and Special Area designations near Dark Canyon SRMA

Dark Canyon SRMA is located on the northern edge of the Monument Upwarp. Deep canyons cut by millions of years of water erosion expose multiple geologic layers including steep slopes of red Oregon Rock Shale, tall white Cedar Mesa Sandstone walls, marine fossil-laced Elephant Canyon sandstone walls and floors, and, in the lowest reaches of the canyon, the gray limestone and lavender shale of the Honaker Trail formation. Waterfalls and pools are common features of the perineal stream which cuts through the benched canyon floor.



Vibrant geologic layers and twisting canyon bottoms visible from the Sundance Trail as it winds along the rim of Dark Canyon

These changes in elevation and geology correspond to three distinct vegetative zones present in the area. At the highest elevations on USFS lands, Douglas fir and aspen dominate. From 6,500 feet to 8,000 feet, ponderosa pine and gable oak become dominant, with an understory of serviceberry, manzintia, and other shrubs. From about 4,500 feet to 6,500 feet elevation is a pinion juniper forest, interspersed with sagebrush flats. Canyons bottoms in this elevation are dominated by cottonwoods, box-elder, willow, and tamarisk.



Outstanding natural beauty and opportunities for solitude contribute to WSA and WSR designations in the SRMA

Evidence of human occupation of the SRMA includes both prehistoric and historic sites. The first permanent human inhabitants of the canyons were probably early Pueblo or Anasazi Indian people. Starting around AD 600, they lived in small farming villages in the upper reaches of the canyon during the summer. They probably moved to larger settlements at lower elevations during the winter. By the 1200s, the people were living deep in the canyons and building the cliff houses that are most evident today. When the first pioneers arrived in this area around 1870, they were attracted to Elk Ridge and the adjacent canyon bottoms because of the lush grass and good water. Al Scorup built one of the largest ranching companies in the state grazing near Dark Canyon. The ranch was headquartered in Dugout Ranch on the north side of Elk Ridge, but remnants are still found in the SRMA.

Dark Canyon was designated a primitive area by the BLM in December of 1970 to protect its outstanding natural beauty and unspoiled conditions, and became an Instant Study Area in 1993. The 1991 Utah BLM Statewide Wilderness Study Report recommended the entire Dark Canyon Instant Study Area Complex (ISA) as eligible for Wilderness designation. The study found that less than 1% of the area had imprints of man, meaning naturalness was present. Outstanding opportunities for solitude were identified in the seclusion provided by deep, winding, and rugged canyons. The seventy five miles of remote, challenging canyon terrain present in the ISA was identified as providing outstanding opportunities for Primitive and Unconfined Recreation. The 2008 RMP identified 11,540 additional acres as lands with wilderness characteristics to be managed for those characteristics, otherwise known as a BLM Natural Area. The lower 6.4 miles of the river in Dark Canyon was recommended as a wild segment suitable for inclusion into the NWSR system to highlight and protect one of the most outstanding stream corridors in the region. This segment is an internationally recognized area known for rugged terrain, primitive recreation, and habitat supporting a broad array of wildlife.

RESOURCE A: RECREATION AND THE SRMA

The goals and objectives for the SRMA are to “provide outstanding recreational opportunities and visitor experiences, while protecting natural and cultural resource values through integrated management between the BLM, USFS and NPS” and to “provide a primitive, roadless, and undeveloped recreational experience in an essentially unmodified natural environment...manage this SRMA to provide opportunities for visitors to realize personal development and growth, enhanced lifestyle, increased local tourism revenue and maintenance of distinct recreation setting character.” Primary activities within the SRMA include backpacking, canyoneering, horseback riding, cultural site visitation, swimming, and wilderness therapy and education. (RMP 2008, Appendix K, pg. 7).

Due to the remoteness, difficulty of access, and size of the canyon network; most recreation in Dark Canyon SRMA takes the form of multi-day backpacking trips. Most visitors access Dark Canyon either by hiking in 16 miles from the Woodenshoe trailhead on the Manti-La Sal National Forest or by descending 1,200 feet in less than one mile down a talus slope from the Sundance Trailhead. Access to several of the canyons is also possible from the Colorado River in Glen Canyon National Park or by 4x4 routes in Beef Basin. Hikers and canyoneers often explore the approximately 10 miles of Dark Canyon on BLM



Remote roads and steep trails make access into Dark Canyon difficult. For this reason, most visitors make multi-day trips.

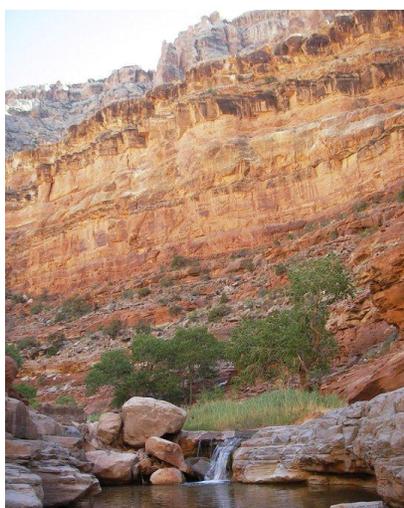
lands, but some venture out into the network of more than 75 miles of tributaries and adjacent canyons located within the SRMA.

Recreational visitation usage numbers for Dark Canyon SRMA are an estimate based on a variety of data sources and professional observation. Visitor use as calculated by BLM is comprised of individual “visits” and estimated “visitor days.” In the case of Dark Canyon SRMA, the majority of visitors are on multi-day backpacking trips, so typically one visit will account for several visitor days. BLM records numbers at Dark Canyon SRMA using a magnetic road counter at the Sundance Trailhead and the register box at Fable Valley trailhead. Use throughout the rest of the area is extrapolated from these values. Use reported by Special Recreation Permit holders is also applied to the final visitation estimate. Based on these data sources, BLM estimates that Dark Canyon receives between 1,500 and 2,125 visits each year, with an annual average of visitor days each year (see table).

Table 5: Average Total and Commercial Visitor Days by Fiscal Year

	FY2013	FY 2014	FY 2015	Three-Year Average
Fable Valley Visits	23	28	77	43
Sundance Trailhead Visits	767	760	782	770
Commercial Guided Visits	239	277	386	300
Commercial Guided Visitor Days	1,474	1,664	1,860*	1,666
Total Dark Canyon Visits	2,125	1,505	1,642	1,757
Total Dark Canyon Visitor Days	10,494	9,429	9,955	9,959
Commercial Visitor Days as a Percentage of All Visitor Days	14%	17%	19%	17%

**2015 SRP use is projected based on pre-trip itineraries filed with BLM, and are assumed to be high, as cancellations typically are not reported until late fall.*



Flowing water makes Dark Canyon an attractive Spring and Fall backpacking destination

The majority of visitation to Dark Canyon SRMA starts at the Sundance Trailhead and is predominantly centered on Dark Canyon and its immediate tributaries; Young’s, Lean-To, and Black Steer Canyons. Visitation typically takes place in the spring and fall. Winter visitation is low due to impassible roads and all but the heartiest backpackers are deterred by the lack of water in lower Dark Canyon in the summer months. Visitation trends over the last three years indicate neither a significant increase nor decrease in total visitation to the area. A substantial percentage, 15% or more, of all visitors to Dark Canyon SRMA are traveling with a commercial guide. Commercial visitation numbers show a slight upward trend over the last few years.

CHAPTER 4 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

DIRECT AND INDIRECT IMPACTS

This section analyzes the impacts of the proposed action and the potentially impacted resources described in the affected environment Chapter 3.

PROPOSED ACTION

Resource A: Recreation

Under Alternative A, a total of 2,855 allocated user days of guided canyoneering would allow for a substantial increase in guided canyoneering and, if used, would account for a 13% increase in overall use days in Dark Canyon SRMA. Because current use levels indicate that guided canyoneering typically accounts for approximately 1,500 to 1,850 user days per year (Table 3), this increase would allow for substantial growth. Visitors lacking the skill or equipment to safely travel rugged backcountry canyons without a guide would have the opportunity to experience Dark Canyon SRMA. Existing operators would be allowed to continue to grow businesses, and opportunities would exist for entrepreneurs to establish new guide services. Permitted guides operate under BLM stipulations, which may result in better outcomes for natural and cultural resources.

Around 1,500 non-commercial canyoneers access Dark Canyon SRMA each year. These users might experience some degree of impact as the total visitation could increase up to 13% if all allocation proposed under Alternative A is utilized. These impacts could include competition for campsites, a reduction in feelings of solitude, and additional noise when passing commercial groups. Due to the extensive nature of the canyon system, the natural screening provided by high twisting canyon walls, and the minimal overall visitation to the SRMA, it is anticipated that any impacts would be rare.

Table 6: Alternative Comparison Matrix

	Current	Alt A	Alt B (2020)
Total Dark Canyon Annual Visitor Use Days	9,959	11,255	8,293
Change in Commerical Visitor Use Days	0	1,296	-1,666
Potential Maximum Commercial Guided Visitor Days	1,666	2,855	0
Potential Commercial Visitation as a Percentage of All Visitation by 2020	17%	25%	0%
Potential Increase in Commercial Visitation as a Percentaage of All Visitation	0%	13%	-17%

NO ACTION

Resource A: Recreation

The No Action alternative, while meeting the BLM's purpose and need of responding to an SRP application, would not allow for the increased recreational benefits of issuing the permit. The new and renewal SRPs would not be issued. As existing permits to guide in Dark Canyon

SRMA expired, the availability of guided canyoneering in the SRMA would gradually diminish, with complete elimination by 2020. This would deprive clients of the opportunity to go on canyoneering trips to these rugged locations with a permitted guide. It may be less likely that BLM rules would be followed if guide services were unavailable.

CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

“Cumulative impacts” are those impacts resulting from the incremental impact of an action when added to other past, present, or reasonably foreseeable actions regardless of what agency or person undertakes such other actions. The cumulative impact area is the Dark Canyon SRMA, which encompasses 30,820 acres. The timeframe for cumulative impacts is five to ten years, which is the duration of most existing and proposed guided canyoneering permits in the area.

Past and ongoing actions that affect the same components of the environment as proposed actions are:

Causal Use (Non-Guided) Canyoneers: Visitor use numbers in RMIS demonstrate steady visitation trend in Dark Canyon SRMA among non-guided canyoneers. Canyoneering is gaining in popularity as a sport; however, this trend does not seem to be reflected in any significant way at Dark Canyon. Although it could be reasonably foreseeable that this use would increase at some point, current indicators suggest steady future use.

Current Permits: Eleven operators currently hold permits with the BLM for guided canyoneering in the Dark Canyon SRMA. These permits typically allow use of all canyons and trailheads within the Dark Canyon SRMA. The terms of these permits range from expiring at the end of 2016 to expiring at the end of 2019.

Alternative A: Recreational canyoneering in Dark Canyon SRMA is likely to remain steady based on trends. Because the increased visitation caused by the proposed action would be slight, it is anticipated that the cumulative effects of the combined guided and non-guided use would be minimal.

Alternative B: Casual use canyoneering would continue as before, but guided canyoneering at Dark Canyon would become progressively less available as existing permits expire. Starting January 1, 2020, there would be no authorized guided canyoneering at Dark Canyon SRMA due to the expiration of all existing permits. Given the interest in guided canyoneering, it is reasonable to expect increased pressures on nearby canyon systems such as White Canyon and Cedar Mesa as the guides seek alternatives. There is also potential for an increase in resource damage and accidents in Dark Canyon as unskilled canyoneers attempt the rugged, remote canyons without the option of a guide service.

CHAPTER 5 CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

INTRODUCTION

The issue identification section of Chapter 1 identifies those issues analyzed in detail in Chapter 4. The ID Team Checklist provides the rationale for issues that were considered but not analyzed further. The issues were identified through the public and agency involvement process described below.

PERSONS, GROUPS, AND AGENCIES CONSULTED

Table 7. List of all Persons, Agencies and Organizations Consulted for Purposes of this EA

Name	Purpose & Authorities for Consultation or Coordination	Findings & Conclusions
Utah State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO)	Consultation for undertakings as required by National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) (16 USC 470)	
Native American Tribal Entities that include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pueblo of Laguna • Pueblo of Acoma • White Mesa Ute Council • Ute Mountain Ute Tribe • Navajo Nation Historic Preservation Department • Pueblo of Zuni • Pueblo of Santa Clara • Pueblo of Zia • Pueblo of Hopi • Pueblo of Jemez • Uintah and Ouray Ute Tribe 	Consultation as required by the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978 (42 USC 1531) and NHPA (16 USC 1531)	
US Fish and Wildlife Service		<i>Consultation Ongoing as of 10/08/15</i>

SUMMARY OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The BLM posted the proposed action on the Environmental Notification Bulletin Board (ENBB) on October 8, 2014, to solicit public input and concerns. No comments were received in response to this posting.

LIST OF PREPARERS

Table 8. List of Preparers

Name	Title	Responsible for the Following Section(s) of the Document
Brian Quigley	Assistant Field Office Manager	NEPA coordination
Casey Worth	Supervisory Outdoor Recreation Planner	Recreation Team Lead; ACECs; Recreation Management , Wild and Scenic Rivers
Misti Haines	Recreation Technician	Environmental Justice; Socioeconomics
Rebecca Doolittle	District Planner and Environmental Coordinator Canyon Country District	NEPA review
Jed Carling	Range Management Specialist	Floodplains; Wetlands/ Riparian; Invasive Species; Livestock Grazing; Rangeland Health Standards; Vegetation;
Mandy Scott	Wildlife Biologist	Water Resources; Wildlife; Special Status Plant and Wildlife Species; Migratory Birds Woodlands/Forestry
Cameron Cox	Archaeologist	Cultural Resources; Paleontology
Cliff Giffen	Natural Resource Specialist	Air Quality; Soils
Cameron Cox	Archaeologist	Native American Concerns
Jeff Brown	Hazardous Material Coordinator/Safety	Hazardous and Solid Wastes; Public Safety
Ted McDougall	Geologist	Mineral Resources/Energy Production

CHAPTER 6 REFERENCES

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